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THAILAND

FIRST PERSON

Changing the Political Culture

Citizens become directly involved with initiating local environmental regulations



Photo: Stanford Smith, US-AEP

“For several years, the city conducted citizen meetings, but we ran the meetings by trial and error,” says Mayor Peerapol Pattanapeeradej. “Using Portland’s 30 years of experience in promoting public participation has allowed us to quickly adapt these methods to satisfy my goal of getting citizens involved.”

As Thailand's local government assumes greater responsibility for environmental management, stopping environmental deterioration has become a critical challenge for municipal leaders. USAID's CityLinks partnership between Portland, Oregon, and Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and Phuket was established to help Thai officials find ways to address that challenge — with the help of community members.

Mayor Peerapol Pattanapeeradej says the partnership has been highly beneficial for Khon Kaen. He followed Portland's recommendations to conduct combination town-hall/open-house meetings and involve stakeholders in developing new regulations. To prepare for the introduction of a new wastewater treatment fee, he arranged public meetings, where city officials talked with water consumers about billing, collection and subsidies. Ultimately, the city was able to broker a landmark agreement — with significant community support — to collect tariffs from large wastewater producers, such as hotels and shopping complexes.

“For several years, the city conducted citizen meetings, but we ran the meetings by trial and error,” said the Mayor. “Through the CityLinks program and working with the city of Portland, we learned proven citizen participation techniques.”

Mayor Peerapol says these innovative public participation tools give citizens a sense of ownership in public decision-making — and they give him a new avenue for progress. “I want to change the political culture. Before, the city operated projects on their own — now I can get citizens directly involved.”